

PROTECTING COASTWISE SHIPPING.

Proposed Inside Route Which Will Avoid Dangers of the Deep.

Special correspondence of The Florida Star.

WASHINGTON, Oct. 23. — It is more than possible that the coming congress will be asked to do something for the advancement of that large and much exploited project for the opening of an "inside" waterway from Massachusetts bay to the gulf of Mexico and the Rio Grande or at least to entertain favorably plans for the immediate carrying out of so much of the great scheme as will relieve our coastwise shipping of the menaces which lurk off Cape Hatteras, the great marine graveyard of the Atlantic. Nowhere on our eastern seaboard, not excepting Cape Cod, is there a jutting headland so dangerous to the mariner as Cape Hatteras, with its treacherous shoals and its mighty surfs. For more than 200 years its terrors have been known and dreaded, and doubtless more lives have been lost there and more damage done to shipping than at any other point along the coast. When a tornado forms in the torrid Atlantic south and east of the Azores and comes whirling along toward our shores, it is at Cape Hatteras that the huge "rollers" which foretell its coming first appear, and as Cape Hatteras lies nearer the usual track of these storms than any other American headland it is here that their full fury is most frequently manifested.

Nor is it dangerous in storms alone, for, as it is the most prominent point in a long stretch of coast line, the tides at every flow come sweeping up to meet and whirl in eddies about it and form such dangerous shoals far out at sea as are rarely to be found elsewhere, while currents of warm moisture laden air from the southeast find here opposing currents of cool air from the north, and fogs well nigh as black as night frequently prevail at midday, so that the incautious mariner often loses his bearings and is stranded or wrecked on the shoals even when no gale is blowing.

The government recently began surveys at two points for an immense inland water route which will altogether avoid Cape Hatteras and its dangers. The proposed route will extend from Norfolk to Beaufort, N. C., and will be accomplished by making a great canal or rather chain of canals between these two cities. The route would embrace the Dismal Swamp canal, which, it will be recalled, was improved and reopened about a year ago after an abandonment of about 30 years. This canal, connecting Chesapeake bay with Albemarle sound, had its real beginning in 1787, when Virginia chartered a company to construct it, the original plans and specifications having been drawn by George Washington. It was not until 1821 that the canal was completed, the artificial waterway being from Deep Creek, on Elizabeth river, about 30 miles above Norfolk, through the Dismal swamp by the way of Lake Drummond to South Mills, on the head waters of the Pasquotank river, a tributary of Albemarle sound. From that time up to 1890 it was one of the best paying properties in the south, and the company owning it became one of the richest and most powerful transportation corporations in the country, exerting large influence on the political affairs of that period.

Then came the strained relations between the north and south, which took from the canal its most fruitful source of revenue, the New England traffic. During the civil war it was confiscated by the federal government and was the scene of many important military engagements. In 1866, being of no further use to the government and having fallen into a state of dilapidation, it was returned to such members of the company as still survived. During the reconstruction period the canal fell into still further decay and was soon after abandoned altogether by the company which had controlled its destinies for a century or more. Four or five years ago the Lake Drummond Canal and Water company acquired the franchises and thoroughly restored the canal after an expenditure of \$900,000.

If the old Dismal Swamp canal is to become a part of the projected "inside" water route, it will be necessary to deepen it considerably. With passage thus secured from the Chesapeake to the Albemarle the next link in the chain would be a route connecting the waters of Albemarle sound with those of Pamlico sound. It is for the establishment of such a route that surveys are being made by government engineers, whose findings, reported through the proper channel, will doubtless reach congress at its coming session.

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